DOCKET ITEM 06-04
Net Density Definition

RECOMMENDATION
Amend the definition of net density to exclude land used for water retention/detention facilities/ponds and the portion of a "pipestem" or 'flag" lot used for access from the net developable area.

BACKGROUND
The City currently uses a definition of net density to determine the amount of residential density allowed on a site. The current definition of "net" excludes critical areas, private access easements, and public rights-of-way from the net density calculation. These two proposed amendments would amend this definition.

Issue One: Density Credit for Surface Water Retention/Detention Ponds
Currently, a property owner gets density credit for the land that is needed for open pond surface water retention/detention. The regional Buildable Lands methodology used to analyze and project land use capacity in all cities excludes these facilities from the net density calculation. As a result, the calculation of density done for Renton plats is actually lower than the true "net density" of a project based on the land used for residential lots. This proposed amendment would make the two methodologies consistent. In addition, under the present density definition, there is less incentive to invest in a surface water vault (closed surface water facility). Under the proposed amendment, land developed with a vault would still be eligible for density credit. This change would create an incentive for additional subterranean surface water facilities.

Issue Two: Density Credit for "Pipestem" or "Flag" Lots
Currently, private access easements are deducted from the net developable area at the time of short platting. These easements are frequently used for access to property without frontage on a public street. The portion of land area dedicated to the driveway or private road needed to give access to property "in back" of a front lot is deducted from the land area of the front lot for the purpose of density, but the "front" property owner still "owns" the land and the "rear" property owner has the right to use the land for access. A "pipestem" or "flag" lot is defined as a "lot not meeting minimum frontage requirements." These lots are sometimes used to give access to developable land that does not have street frontage. A small loophole currently exists in Renton's regulations in that a property owner platting with a "pipestem" lot is allowed to count the entire land area of a pipestem lot in the net developable area. As a result an incentive for a "pipestem" lot configuration is created. When a pipestem lot is created, rather than a private access easement, two consequences occur:

1) Density is increased slightly because there is a larger net developable area.
2) The property owner of the "rear" lot owns the property. This affects frontage standards for the original lot, and in some cases will affect setbacks. Renton standards currently require a 15-foot side setback from a street. An access driveway within a private access easement triggers this standard but the setback off of an access driveway on a "pipestem" lot would be five feet.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMPLIANCE

Policy LU-10 *Use buildable lands data and market analysis to establish adopted capacity for either jobs or housing within each adopted zoning classification.*

This policy gives direction to support using a methodology consistent with the Buildable Lands analysis for calculating density.

Policy CD- 17 *Development should be designed (e.g. site layout, building orientation, setbacks, landscape areas and open space, parking, and outdoor activity areas) to result in a high quality development as a primary goal, rather than to maximize density as a first consideration.*

This policy gives direction to support standard and quality lot configurations rather than to maximize density.

CONCLUSION

This amendment would change the calculation of the net developable area for density purposes to eliminate the difference between lots with access easements and lots with "pipestems."